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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/03/2017
TAGS: PREL, MOPS, PTER, IZ, TU
SUBJECT: TURKISH AIR STRIKES AGAINST PKK TERRORISTS IN
NORTHERN IRAQ: A SNAPSHOT

REF: A. 2007 ANKARA 3028

B. 2007 ANKARA 3006
C. 2007 ANKARA 2991
D. 2007 ANKARA 2990
E. 2007 ANKARA 2983

Classified By: CDA Nancy McEldowney, reasons 1.4 (b and d)

1. (S) Summary: Between December 16 and 26, Turkey launched four air strikes against PKK terrorist targets in northern Iraq. The first attack on December 16 had the largest number of targets and struck the furthest south, hitting locations on south Qandil Mountain. Prior to the first attack, Turkish General Staff (TGS) provided brief advance notification. Subsequent strikes on December 17, 22, and 26 were smaller, more narrowly focused on PKK targets closer to the Turkish border, and were preceded by as much as 12 hours advance notice. Targets for all the attacks were derived from intelligence acquired by the Combined Intelligence Fusion Cell (CIFC), jointly staffed by the US and Turkey. End summary.

First Strike Large and Last Minute

2. (S) The December 16 attack was the first confirmed air operation against PKK terrorist targets in northern Iraq since intensified intelligence sharing with the GOT began on November 19. 12-24 F-16 aircraft attacked 22 targets in the Zap, Avasin, and Hakurk areas of northern Iraq and 11 targets in the southern Qandil Mountain area. Specific targets were PKK facilities and training camp sites selected by TGS using intelligence provided by the CIFC. TGS notified the Office of Defense Cooperation in Ankara (ODC) at 11:47 PM local time on December 15 of its intent to launch aircraft at 1:00 AM on December 26. ODC immediately notified relevant US military authorities in order to deconflict land and air battlespace. At 2:45 AM, MNF-I reported that the ground battlespace was deconflicted and at 2:55 AM the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, confirmed that the airspace was clear. At 3:00 AM on December 16, TGS notified ODC that cross-border artillery fire was commencing. TGS publicly announced the strikes on its web site that morning, reporting that all aircraft had returned safely to base by 4:15 AM local time December 16.

More Recent Strikes Smaller, More Focused

3. (S) The attack on December 17 was a combined artillery and air action, but smaller in scope and limited to the northern Metina and Zap regions, near the Turkish border. This attack was better coordinated. 4 F-16s were used. TGS compared its target list to the list of prohibited targets in advance and

provided notification of the specific grid coordinates of the targets to ODC at 11:30 AM local time on December 17. Turkish Air Force (TUAF) held the aircraft within Turkish air space until both MNF-I and the Al Udeid CAOC confirmed that the battlespace was deconflicted. Turkish aircraft entered Iraqi airspace at 12:15 PM local time and concluded their attack within 90 minutes. At approximately 2:00 PM, TGS notified ODC that artillery fire was beginning on the same locations targeted by the air strike. At 3:25 PM, TGS advised ODC that the artillery attack was completed.

4. (S) On December 22, Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) conducted another combined air and artillery attack in the northern Metina and Zap region using four F-16s. At 2:25 PM local time, TGS notified ODC of its intention to launch aircraft. Following US confirmation of battlespace deconfliction, the F-16s entered Iraqi airspace at 3:21 PM, dropped approximately 10 bombs, and completed their attack at 4:41 PM local time. At approximately 5:00 PM, TGS informed ODC that it would begin artillery fire against the same targets. At 6:21 PM, the artillery fire ended.

5. (S) The most recent air attack occurred on the morning of December 26 when four F-16s again struck in the northern Metina and Zap region. The principle target was a cave

complex in eastern Zap. TGS provided over 12 hours advance notice for this attack, informing ODC at about 8:00 PM local time on December 25 before the aircraft crossed into Iraqi airspace at 8:15 AM on December 26. The attack concluded at 9:25 AM local time.

Assessing the Impact

6. (S) It is difficult to make definitive judgments about the impact of Turkish operations because we lack an independent assessment capability. In many cases, sole sources of information have been press reports (by journalists not located within the affected regions) or Iraqi Kurdish reactions (that appear to fall wide of the mark). While the Turkish military has publicly claimed to have eliminated over 150 PKK terrorists, we believe a more likely number is around a dozen terrorists along with housing, training sites, and cave complexes. It is also our judgment that the collateral damage resulting from the 11 targets on south Kandil in the December 16 strike (1 civilian casualty and displacement of village families) has not recurred in any of the three subsequent strikes which have been more narrowly focused on the northern border region. However, for the Government of

Turkey the most significant factor is not the specifics of battle damage assessment, but rather the fact that military operations have positioned Turkey to work more effectively on a comprehensive solution to the PKK problem. Maintaining a credible threat of use of force is, in their view, the essential factor that enables them to proceed with the diplomatic, political, economic, and social steps necessary to resolve this long-standing terrorist problem.

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